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Grading Students in Inclusive Settings

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- ✓ Based on his success in being mainstreamed for mathematics, Victor was placed in a general education classroom on a full-time basis. Victor was excited about his new placement and looked forward to being in class with his friends. His parents and his teacher were impressed by Victor's effort as he put in extra hours working on his assignments and studying for tests. Unfortunately, his grades on assignments and tests were not commensurate with his effort, and Victor was disappointed when he received Cs and Ds on his report card. His parents and teacher were heartbroken when they heard him say, "I worked so hard and this is what happens. Why bother?"
- ✓ The Smiths were pleased that their daughter Mary was being educated with her peers in the general education classroom. Although they wanted Mary to develop her academic skills, they viewed this placement as an opportunity for Mary to make friends, have the same experiences as other children, and learn to be independent, goals which were listed in Mary's individualized education program (IEP). They were pleased that Mary was happier, more confident, and making new friends, but they were disappointed when her report card focused only on letter grades for academic subjects and did not reflect Mary's development in other areas.
- ✓ Before recently moving to the United States, Rafael had been an A student in his native country and was on his way to fulfilling his family's dream that he attend college. On arrival in the United States, Rafael was placed in a 10th-grade general education class and received the services of an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teacher.

Although he had learned many of the concepts in his native language, Rafael began to struggle in school and failed several classes because of his limited knowledge of English. Embarrassed by his poor grades, Rafael considered leaving school.

- ✓ Mr. Jones, a high school science teacher, and Ms. Washington, a special education teacher, recently began to work together as a cooperative teaching team. They were beginning to adjust to each other when it was time to grade students for the first marking period. Mr. Jones felt that it was his responsibility to grade all the students. He also felt that it was only fair to grade all students in the same way, because their averages and class ranking would determine their eligibility for honors and awards and their admission to college. Though he recognized the importance of classroom-based assignments, he felt that students' grades should be based on tests because all students would ultimately have to pass the statewide assessments; and he felt that some of the students had received special help from Ms. Washington to complete their assignments. Ms. Washington believed that she should collaborate with Mr. Jones in grading students, and that grades should be based on multiple assessment measures and not just tests. She felt that students with special needs should not be penalized for receiving her services, because these services allowed them to learn and demonstrate their mastery of the class content, based on their unique learning needs and styles, and did not violate the integrity of the curriculum and standards.

As these situations demonstrate, the issue of grading students is multifaceted and has implications for students, families, and educators. These scenarios indicate that grading is more complex than selecting alternative grading systems to assign report card grades to individual students. Grading is an

important issue for all students; but it is especially important for students with disabilities educated in inclusive settings, who tend to receive lower grades than their general education peers (Munk & Bursuck, 2001).

Issues related to grading are further complicated by several factors. One fac-

tor is the conflict between the movement toward more "rigorous standards" and the movement to educate all students in general education settings (Hendrickson & Gable, 1997). Another factor is the limited number of districts that have specific policies to guide educators in grading students (Polloway et

al., 1994). Finally, the grading of all students is hindered by the limited training that educators have received regarding the use of effective and legally sound grading practices (Guskey, 1994).

As a result of these factors, many school districts lack current grading policies that are consistent with increased academic standards, best practices in grading, and legal guidelines for grading all students.

This article offers guidelines for determining equitable, accountable, and effective grading practices and policies for all students that balance the need for a common set of standards and the individual needs of students. Though the article is based on the literature on best practices and legal guidelines for grading of students with special needs, it examines these issues within the broader context of improving grading for all students.

Guidelines on Grading

1. Establish a diverse committee to examine, develop, and evaluate the district's grading policies and practices.

Initially, the school district can form a grading-policy committee that includes a diverse group of students, family members, educators, and community members. The inclusion of family and community members helps the committee focus attention on local preferences. To provide access to a wide range of perspectives on grading, the committee should include high- and low-performing students and their family members, community members who represent the diverse groups that reside in the district, and individuals who have knowledge of the legal guidelines related to grading, learning standards, educational assessment, curriculum and instruction.

2. Review the district's current grading policies and practices.

The committee begins its work by reviewing the district's current grading policies and practices. Specifically, the committee examines the district's grading, policies, and practices in terms of the following:

- ✓ The date they were adopted.

- ✓ The philosophical and legal framework on which they are based.
- ✓ The types of grading policies and practices addressed.
- ✓ The procedures for modifying grading for individual students.
- ✓ The ways in which individuals are informed about the policies and trained to implement them.
- ✓ The frequency with which they are evaluated (Polloway et al., 1994).

3. Identify the preferences of students, families, educators, and community members concerning various aspects of grading.

The committee gathers information by interviewing or surveying students, families, educators, and community members to identify their feelings and experiences regarding various aspects of grading (Marzano, 2000). Frequently, the committee uses interviews and sur-

Form a grading-policy committee that includes a diverse group of students, family members, educators, and community members.

veys to identify the district members' preferences in terms of the purposes of grading. Figure 1 shows the varied purposes of grading.

Interviews and surveys also address the district members' reactions to the different types of referent grading systems: norm-referenced systems, criterion-referenced systems, and self-referenced systems, as follows:

Figure 1. Purposes of Grading

1. **Achievement:** To certify and measure mastery of curricular goals and specific skills (e.g., learning standards).
2. **Progress:** To indicate progress in learning over a specific period of time.
3. **Effort:** To acknowledge and indicate the effort a student puts forth in learning.
4. **Comparison:** To compare students in terms of their competence, progress, and effort.
5. **Instructional Planning:** To identify students' learning strengths and needs, and to group students for instruction.
6. **Program Effectiveness:** To examine the efficacy of the instructional program.
7. **Motivation:** To motivate students to learn, to reward learning, and to promote self-esteem.
8. **Communication:** To provide feedback to students, families, and others.
9. **Educational and Career Planning:** To aid students, families, and school districts in determining the courses and educational services needed by students, placing students who enter the school district from another school district, and planning for the future (e.g., facilitate student advisement and career planning).
10. **Eligibility:** To determine eligibility for graduation and promotion, and rank students in terms of their eligibility for certain programs and awards (e.g., honors programs, participation in extracurricular activities, grants, scholarships, rankings for college admission).
11. **Accountability:** To provide measures of student achievement to the community, employers, legislators, and educational policymakers (e.g., grades provide employers with a point of reference concerning the aptitude and job skills of prospective employees).

- ✓ In *norm-referenced grading systems*, all students are evaluated using the same standards; and their grades are based on their performance in comparison to the performance of others.
- ✓ In *criterion-referenced systems*, all students are evaluated based on their mastery of previously established standards or curriculum, and student performance is not compared to others.
- ✓ *Self-referenced systems* evaluate all students based on their growth in comparison to their past performance, ability levels, effort, and special needs.

The committee should also identify and take into account the feelings of district members about the factors affecting student grading—and the extent to which educators should consider these factors. Such factors include academic performance, effort, behavior, participation, and attendance (Marzano, 2000).

In addition, the committee should collect data to assess district members' satisfaction with existing grading systems, policies, and practices. Surveys and interviews should identify the concerns and benefits associated with the district's grading policies, as well as components and practices of the district's grading policies that appear to be effective or in need of revision. Committee members also should solicit feedback regarding possible solutions and resources to address concerns and practices in need of revision.

4. Learn about and understand the legal guidelines for grading.

Because grading policies and practices must be consistent with legal guidelines, the committee will need to learn about legal guidelines for grading. For

Self-referenced systems evaluate all students based on their growth in comparison to their past performance, ability levels, effort, and special needs.

example, the committee should examine guidelines for confidentiality that are specified in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Although congressional acts, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), focus on people with disabilities, they provide legal guidelines that affect the grading of all students. Whereas the IDEA does not specifically mention individual grading, it mandates that the IEP include a statement of how often the student's family will be regularly informed of their child's progress, which must occur at least as often as families of children without disabilities are informed of their progress. Section 504 and Title II of the ADA, however, which are under the legal authority of the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), contain language that addresses grading.

When reviewing educational policies and practices, OCR evaluates them in terms of the principles of disparate treatment and disparate impact, as follows:

- ✓ *Disparate treatment* refers to treating students differently because of their characteristics and membership in a particular group.
- ✓ *Disparate impact* examines whether the similar treatment of students has different outcomes for certain groups of students.

Applying these two principles to Section 504 and Title II of the ADA, OCR (LRP Publications, 1997) has specified the following:

- ✓ School districts cannot treat students with and without disabilities differently in terms of grades, class ranking, honors, awards, graduation, and diplomas. A modified grading system can be used, however, if it is available to *all* students.
- ✓ If a student with a disability takes a general education class for no credit or for reasons other than mastery of the curriculum, it is allowable for the student to be graded using procedures that are different from the class at large, and evaluated based on the objectives in the IEP.

Legally, a modified grading system can be used if it is available to all students.

- ✓ Guidelines and criteria for ranking students or granting awards or honors cannot arbitrarily lessen or exclude the grades of students receiving special education services. Weighted grading systems are permissible as long as they are predicated on "objective rating criteria" (e.g., computing grade point averages based on assigning points to grades according to the degree of difficulty of the content studied). The use of core courses for awarding honors, ranking students, or allowing participation in specific activities is permissible as long as those courses are open and available to all students.
- ✓ Although general designations or labels that do not indicate a student's participation in special education are permissible, special education classes cannot be listed on transcripts to show that a student received adaptations in the general education classroom.
- ✓ School districts can employ symbols or terminology on a transcript to indicate a modified curriculum in general education as long as the grades and courses of all students are treated in a similar way. For example, terms such as "basic" or "practical" can be used on transcripts as long as they refer to courses or programs that students without disabilities also may take. Caution should be used with terms that are associated with programs solely or typically for students with disabilities such as "resource room," "homebound instruction," and "special opportunity school."
- ✓ School districts are permitted to designate special education courses on a transcript to a postsecondary institution in cases where the parent and the student have been informed and have provided their consent in writing.

5. Select grading policies that are consistent with the legal guidelines and the district's preferences and that are acceptable to students, teachers, and family members.

The committee uses the information and data collected to select policies that

- ✓ Are flexible and practical for teachers to implement.
- ✓ Foster individualization and address a wide range of teaching styles and student needs.
- ✓ Communicate useful and positive information to students and families to improve student learning.

Figure 2 shows possible grading systems to be considered by the committee. As mandated by legal guidelines, the grading systems selected should be applied to and be sensitive to the needs of all students. The grading systems selected also should be compatible with the district's preferences regarding the purposes of grading, the different types of referent grading systems to be used, and the factors to be considered in determining grades. For example, if the district's purpose of grading students is to compare them solely on the basis of their academic performance, then a norm-referenced grading system such as letter or numerical grades can be selected.

Conversely, if the primary purpose of grading is to document student progress in a variety of areas, a criterion-referenced grading system such as a checklist system can be chosen. Because many school districts may view grades as having multiple and often contradictory functions (e.g., motivation versus comparison, or competence versus effort), however, the committee should recognize that there is a need for use of multifaceted grading systems, such as level or multiple grading.

The district's policy also should provide teachers with flexible guidelines regarding the basis for assigning grades, which also contributes to the type of grading system selected. Specifically, the policy can address the extent to which grading should be based on academic performance measures, effort, behavior, attendance, participation, attitude, and other variables that support

Figure 2. Grading Systems

- ✓ **Numeric/Letter Grades:** Teachers assign numeric or letter grades based on students' performance on tests or specific learning activities.
- ✓ **Checklists/Rating Scales:** Teachers develop checklists and rating scales that delineate the benchmarks associated with their courses and evaluate each student according to mastery of these benchmarks. Some school districts have revised their grading systems by creating rating scales for different grade levels. Teachers rate students on each skill, using a scale that includes "not yet evident," "beginning," "developing," and "independent."
- ✓ **Anecdotal/Descriptive and Portfolio Grading:** Teachers write descriptive comments regarding students' skills, learning styles, effort, attitudes, and growth, and strategies to improve student performance. These comments can be included with examples of students' work as part of portfolio grading.
- ✓ **Pass/Fail Systems:** Minimum course competencies are specified and students who demonstrate mastery receive a "P" grade, while those who fail to meet the minimum standards are given an "F" grade. Some schools have modified the traditional pass/fail grading system to include such distinctions as honors (HonorP), high pass (HP), pass (P), and low pass (LP).
- ✓ **Mastery Level/Criterion Systems:** Students and teachers meet to divide the material into a hierarchy of skills and activities, based on an assessment of individual needs and abilities. After completing the learning activities, students take a posttest or perform an activity to demonstrate mastery of the content. When students demonstrate mastery, they receive credit for that accomplishment and repeat the process with the next skill to be mastered.
- ✓ **Progressive Improvement Grading:** Students take exams and engage in learning activities, and receive feedback and instruction based on their performance throughout the grading period. Only performance on cumulative tests and learning activities during the final weeks of the grading period, however, are used to determine students' grades.
- ✓ **Multiple Grading:** Teachers grade students in the areas of ability, effort, and achievement. Students' report cards can then include a listing of the three grades for each content area, or grades can be computed by weighting the three areas.
- ✓ **Level Grading:** Teachers use a numeric subscript to indicate the level of difficulty at which the students' grades are based. For example, a grade of B₆ can be used to note that a student is working in the B range at the sixth-grade level. Subscript systems can also be devised to indicate whether students are working at grade level, above grade level, or below grade level.
- ✓ **Contract Grading:** Teachers and students agree on a contract outlining the learning objectives; the amount, nature, and quality of the products students must complete; and the procedures for evaluating student products and assigning a grade.
- ✓ **Individualized Education Program (IEP) Grading:** Teachers assign grades that acknowledge students' progress in meeting the students' IEP goals and performance criteria.

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learning (O'Connor, 1995). In addition, the policy can assist teachers by defining the grading factors in sufficient detail so that they are able to be measured more accurately and equitably (Hendrickson & Gable, 1997).

The purposes of grading may change as students progress through school; thus, the committee should consider adopting different grading systems for different grades. At the elementary level, an anecdotal grading system can be used to communicate academic gains, as well as social and developmental accomplishments.

In high schools, where grading is used to rank students to determine their eligibility for programs and awards, the committee may need to consider policies for weighting grades. These weighting policies must be based on an objective rating scale that is applied to all students and that treats their grades in the same manner. For example, if the grading policy specifies that grades for courses are weighted based on their level of difficulty, all courses must be open and available to all students. Further, the designation of courses on transcripts also needs to be addressed so that it does not indicate student participation in special education (e.g., Resource Room Math), but rather refers to modified or advanced courses (e.g., Basic Physics, Advanced English) that all students may take.

When selecting appropriate grading systems and policies, the committee also should consider their acceptability to students, teachers, and their families. For example, many teachers may find it

difficult to implement a checklist or anecdotal recording system because preparing grading checklists of learning outcomes and writing grading narratives of student performance require a significant amount of teacher time (Guskey, 1994). Similarly, using such grading terms as “not yet evident,” “beginning,” and “developing” rather than “poor,” “needs improvement,” and “unsatisfactory” are preferable to students and their families because they communicate information about student performance in a more positive manner.

Grading policies also should address and be adaptable to a range of situations that students and teachers may encounter. Therefore, the district’s grading policies also should address such issues as cooperative teaching arrangements, incomplete grades, and students whose educational needs require grading modifications.

Because many school districts employ cooperative teaching arrangements as part of their efforts to educate students in inclusive settings, the committee also will need to address issues related to collaborative grading. Such policies minimize the confusion that teachers like Mr. Jones and Ms. Washington experience when working collaboratively by clarifying each team member’s role and responsibility in grading students, and specifying that students should not be penalized for receiving and benefiting from specialized services. Christiansen and Vogel (1998) offered a decision model that teachers working in cooperative teaching arrangements can use to resolve conflicts in their grading practices, and make grading students a collaborative process.

The district’s policies can also cover the assignment of incomplete grades. In addition to assigning incomplete grades to students who have unusual circumstances (e.g., frequent absences because of medical conditions or treatments, or absences because of family difficulties), incomplete grades provide all students with the time and opportunities they need to demonstrate their mastery of the learning standards associated with a specific course of study. Therefore, the

committee should consider an incomplete grade policy that allows teachers to assign students incomplete grades and specify what students need to do to complete the assignment successfully.

The district’s policy also should address procedures for determining grading adaptations for all students who are not working on general education goals and learning standards and will not participate in statewide assessments. Whereas grading adaptations for students with disabilities are often determined by the multidisciplinary team and listed in students’ IEPs, grading alternatives for students without disabilities can be specified by the school’s prereferral team.

Munk and Bursuck (2001) developed a collaborative model that the multidisciplinary team can use to personalize grading plans that involves selecting, implementing, and evaluating grading alternatives that address the individualized needs and grading purposes of students. For example, a student like Mary might benefit from use of an IEP grading system, in which the goals and performance criteria on her IEP serve as the basis for her grades.

6. Encourage teachers to use effective practices that support the teaching, learning, and grading processes.

Although the district’s policies will provide teachers with flexible parameters for grading students, teachers will need to use practices that foster the use of differentiated instruction, enhance student learning, and facilitate the grading process (Tomlinson, 2001). The adoption of such practices helps teachers balance the principles of disparate treatment and disparate impact by establishing learning standards for grading all students and providing all students with varied learning activities and multiple ways of demonstrating their understanding and mastery of learning standards. These varied learning activities and assessment measures should address students’ unique learning needs, strengths, and styles, as well as their experiential, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds (see box, “Effective Instructional Practices”).

Transcripts of grades should not use terms like “resource room,” “homebound instruction,” and “special opportunity school” that are associated with programs solely or typically for students with disabilities.

Effective Instructional Practices

Effective practices that support the teaching, learning, and grading processes include the following:

✓ ***Communicating Expectations and Grading Guidelines.***

Student performance is enhanced when teachers clearly communicate their expectations to students and families and share their grading guidelines and criteria with them (O'Connor, 1995). For example, at the beginning of a grading period, many teachers offer students and families a review of the factors, assignments, and criteria that they will employ when grading students.

✓ ***Informing Students and Families Regarding Grading Progress on a Regular Basis.*** Providing students and their families with ongoing information concerning current performance and grades helps all involved parties understand the grading guidelines. Ongoing sharing of students' grading progress facilitates the modifications of instructional programs so that students and families are not surprised by the grades received at the end of the grading period. It also prompts students to examine their effort, motivation, and attitudes and their impact on their performance and grades.

For example, the disappointment experienced by Victor, his teacher, and his family may have been lessened if they had examined his grades during the grading period, and made revisions to the instructional program to promote his performance.

✓ ***Reviewing Exemplary Models of Classroom Assignments.*** A good way for teachers to help students understand their grading expectations for assignments is to review exemplary models of classroom assignment with students (Whittaker, Salend, & Duhaney, 2001). When reviewing exemplary assignments, teachers ask their students to identify the qualities associated with exemplary models of an assignment, and then discuss the qualities that will be considered when grading the assignment.

✓ ***Using a Range of Assignments That Address Students' Varied Learning Needs, Strengths, and Styles.*** Rather than assigning grades based solely on test performance or a limited number of assignments, many teachers determine students' grades by weighing a variety of student assignments (e.g., tests, homework, projects, extra credit, class participation, attendance, behavior, and other factors; O'Connor, 1995). They weight assignments in terms of their importance and the nature of the skills that they cover with respect to the learning standards.

✓ ***Employing Classroom-Based Assessment Alternatives to Traditional Testing.*** Whereas grades are frequently determined by students' performance on tests, they also can be based on classroom-based assessment techniques, such as performance assessment, portfolio

assessment, and curriculum-based measurement (Bradley & Calvin, 1998). By using performance assessment, teachers grade students on authentic products (e.g., creating and making things, solving problems, responding to simulations, giving presentations, performing experiments) that demonstrate their skills, problem-solving abilities, knowledge, and understanding of the learning standards. Similarly, student portfolios and curriculum-based measurements that are linked to the learning standards serve as tools for grading students and guiding the teaching and learning process.

✓ ***Providing Feedback on Assignments and Grading Students After They Have Learned Something Rather Than While They Are Learning It.*** Before grading students on an assignment or a test, teachers should provide a range of appropriate learning activities and give nongraded assignments that help students practice and develop their skills (O'Connor, 1995). As students work on these assignments, teachers should give them feedback and additional instructional experiences to improve their learning of the material, which is then assessed when they have completed the learning cycle.

✓ ***Involving Students in the Grading Process.*** Instructional rubrics provide students with a framework for self-evaluating their performance on an ongoing basis and facilitate the grading and feedback process for students by clarifying and communicating their teachers' expectations (Whittaker et al., 2001). Because rubrics give students greater responsibility over their learning, they help foster a relationship of trust between students and teachers, which supports the teaching and learning process. Students also are actively involved in the assessment and learning process by teaching them to use self-management strategies and self-evaluation checklists, providing them with opportunities to grade themselves and others, and incorporating their suggestions into grading assignments and tests (Bradley & Calvin, 1998; Tomlinson, 2001).

✓ ***Avoiding Competition and Promoting Collaboration.*** While grading on a curve results in a consistent grade distribution, it hinders the teaching and learning process by promoting competition among students (Guskey, 1994; Kohn, 1999). Therefore, educators minimize competition by grading students in reference to specific learning criteria and refraining from posting grades (Bradley & Calvin, 1998).

Teachers also promote collaboration among students by structuring learning and assessment activities so that students work together and are graded cooperatively (Salend, 2001). For example, some teachers use a two-tiered cooperative system, where students work in cooperative groups to perform an assessment task or

Effective Instructional Practices (continued)

take a test, and each student receives the group grade. After the groups complete their work, each student works individually on a second product or test that covers similar material. Students are then graded by receiving two separate grades, averaging their two grades together into one grade, or selecting the higher grade.

✓ ***Giving Separate Grades for Content and Style.***

Although some students may master the content of an assignment or a test, they may encounter difficulties presenting the products of their learning (Salend, 2001). For example, although Rafael understood the material, his English skills limited his ability to demonstrate his mastery of the material. Therefore, when grammar, spelling, and punctuation or other stylistic factors are not essential elements to be assessed, teachers may choose to give separate grades for content and style. In addition, when it is appropriate, students can use drawings, demonstrations, dramatizations, models, and visuals to demonstrate their mastery of the content skills being graded.

✓ ***Designing Valid Tests and Providing Students with Appropriate Testing Accommodations.***

Teachers enhance the value of their tests and promote student performance by developing valid tests and providing students with appropriate testing accommodations (Elliott, Kratochwill, & Schulte, 1998). In designing valid tests, teachers select the content of the test so that it relates to the learning standards, the manner in which the content was taught, and the amount of class time devoted to the topics on the test. Teachers also carefully examine the format and readability of their tests, and provide students with the testing accommodations outlined on their IEPs. Further, advances in technology and multimedia allow teachers to use technology-based testing to assess students' responses to authentic situations and modify the presentation and response modes of items to tailor tests to the unique needs of students.

✓ ***Teaching Test-Taking to Students.*** Instruction in test-taking skills helps students perform at their optimal levels by reducing testing anxiety and assisting them in feeling comfortable with the format of the test (Berendt & Koski, 1999). Therefore, teachers should offer instruction to help students develop their test-taking skills for use with all types of items, as well as those for use both before and during testing (Salend, 2001).

✓ ***Using Extra Credit Judiciously.*** Extra credit is often used to motivate students to expand their understanding of concepts and to assist students who need additional points to raise their grades from one level to another (e.g., moving from a 75 to an 80). But because extra credit should not be used to help students compensate near the end of the grading period for work they failed to do, it should be used judiciously.

✓ ***Using Median Scores to Compute Grades.*** Although most teachers use an average to convert a series of scores on tests and assignments into a grade, averaging tends to accentuate the effect of a poor score (Guskey, 1994). Similarly, giving zeros because of frequent absences, tardiness, or misbehavior makes it nearly impossible for some students to receive a good grade and often serves to discourage future learning. Therefore, teachers should consider using the median to determine students' grades (O'Connor, 1995).

✓ ***Using the Internet to Communicate with Students and Families.*** The Internet serves as a way for teachers to communicate with students and families and support student learning (Salend, 2001). For example, teachers can post grading criteria and guidelines, current grades, exemplary models, and instructional rubrics on the Internet so that students and families can access them at their convenience. Because some students and families may not have access to the Internet, teachers should also use alternative communication strategies.

7. Communicate the grading system and policies to students, families, and educators; and offer training to help these groups understand and implement these policies.

Once the school district has formulated grading policies, the committee should share them with students, families, and teachers. These groups also should receive training so that they understand the policies and how to implement them in a fair and consistent manner

(Guskey, 1994). The training also can address the fairness of the grading policies for all students by reviewing the legal and philosophical framework on which the policies are based, and offering educators strategies for responding to concerns about fairness (Welch, 2000). Training for teachers also should include the use of varied assessment strategies and differentiated instruction that supports the learning of all students.

8. Evaluate the impact of the grading policies and practices on students, family members, educators, the community, and the curriculum on a continuous basis and revise accordingly.

Schools and districts must continually evaluate and refine their grading policies and practices if these policies are to achieve their intended outcomes and be useful to all the audiences for which they are designed. Therefore, it is important to examine their effect on stu-

The committee should examine guidelines for confidentiality that are specified in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

dents, educators, family members, and community members. Primarily, schools and districts should assess the effect of the policies on student learning by examining data such as increased mastery of learning standards, changes in students' grades, and improved performance on classroom-based activities and statewide exams.

Information on the perceptions of students, educators, and family members regarding the grading policies is also helpful in examining their overall effectiveness and acceptability. For example, the committee can ask teachers to reflect on the effect of the policies on the teaching and learning process, including the following:

- ✓ Fostering student performance.
- ✓ Assessing students' strengths and learning needs.
- ✓ Supporting differentiated instruction.
- ✓ Communicating with students and families.
- ✓ Evaluating and grading student work.

Students, family members, and educators can also provide information to identify successful and unsuccessful aspects of the grading policies and make recommendations for improving them.

Final Thoughts

The grading of students in inclusive settings is controversial and shaped by a number of factors. School districts need to employ grading policies and practices that are consistent with best practices and legal guidelines and that support mastery of academic standards. We need fair, accountable, and effective grading policies and practices that help all students achieve higher academic standards within the context of the general education classroom.

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